

BAKER SAID TO ASK VILNIUS TO SUSPEND INDEPENDENCE ACT

TALKS WITH THE PREMIER

Lithuania's Parliament Meets
Today to Weigh Reaction
to Gorbachev Session

MOSCOW, May 18 — Secretary of State James A. Baker 3d urged the Lithuanian Prime Minister today to consider suspending her republic's declaration of independence as a way of opening a dialogue with Moscow, Lithuanian officials said.

Prime Minister Kazimiera Prunskiene thus returned to Lithuania tonight under pressure from both summit-bound superpowers — overt pressure from Moscow, more subtle nudging from the United States — to find a way out of the impasse that has threatened to cloud the meeting in Washington between President Bush and President Mikhail S. Gorbachev.

The Lithuanian Parliament, scheduled a meeting for Saturday to hear a report on Mrs. Prunskiene's meetings, held on Thursday with Mr. Gorbachev and today with Mr. Baker, and to discuss the possibility of further concessions.

Lithuanians Vow to Resist

Lithuanian officials here and in the republic said their Parliament would fiercely resist any proposal to bring it back under Soviet sovereignty.

But Mrs. Prunskiene's encounters in Moscow set off a search for compromises, including some that would combine suspension of the independence declaration with guarantees of Soviet non-interference.

Mr. Gorbachev's impending meeting with Mr. Bush, beginning on May 30, has injected a new note of realpolitik into a sovereignty conflict that has been marked by pride and unbending principle on both sides.

Lithuanian Oil Running Out

Both the Americans and Mr. Gorbachev are eager to keep the Soviet leader's visit to America from being overshadowed by television footage of Lithuania, which is due to exhaust its oil reserves, limited by a Soviet blockade, a few days before the summit opens.

The Lithuanians, in turn, see this sensitive moment as an opportunity to press the Soviets toward talks and to involve the Americans more deeply in the dispute.

This week's round of diplomacy began with a closed session of the Lithuanian Parliament on Wednesday that produced the republic's first formal of-

fer of compromise: an agreement to suspend the laws passed since independence, notably measures abolishing the Soviet draft, laying claim to federal property, and setting limits on who can be a Lithuanian citizen, while leaving the independence act itself untouched.

Mr. Gorbachev, in turn, yielded on his insistence that he had nothing to say to Lithuania's leaders until they bowed to Soviet authority. But he demanded that Lithuania suspend the independence act as a condition for opening talks.

At a news conference today, Mrs. Prunskiene said that in their meeting on Thursday the Soviet leader was tough and sometimes threatening, suggesting that tougher sanctions could be in store if the republic balked at Moscow's demand.

The Lithuanian Prime Minister praised the Americans for supporting Lithuania, noting that Mr. Baker had described the issue as an international issue, not merely domestic.

But other Lithuanian officials said Mr. Baker's sympathy was coupled with an appeal for conciliation. They said he had tried to persuade Mrs. Prunskiene that suspending the declaration of independence would not amount to a retreat to Soviet rule.

"Mr. Baker laid out his understanding of the sense of a freezing or suspending of our act and laws," said Ceslovas Stankevicius, the Lithuanian Vice President, who attended the meeting. "He said that it in no case means the repeal or annulling of those documents. He said it should be understood as merely freezing the enforcement of those acts."

This is also the position taken by President François Mitterrand of France and Chancellor Helmut Kohl of West Germany, who urged suspension of the declaration as a route to negotiations last month.

Mrs. Prunskiene, in turn, explained that Lithuanians feared that suspending the independence document would be taken by Moscow as a surrender to Soviet law.

A senior American official, asked tonight whether Mr. Baker had urged the Lithuanians to suspend their act of independence, declined to answer directly, but said Mr. Baker had raised with Mrs. Prunskiene "perspectives on how progress might be made."



Agence France-Presse

Prime Minister Kazimiera Prunskiene of Lithuania, who met on Thursday with President Mikhail S. Gorbachev, at the American Ambassador's residence in Moscow with Secretary of State James A. Baker 3d.

An opportunity to press the Soviets toward Baltic talks?

"He talked about what it is the Soviets seem to need, and he talked about what it is the Lithuanians seem to need, and he talked with her at length about her ideas on suspension of laws, and said a way has to be found to get a dialogue going," the official said.

Americans seemed relieved that Mr. Gorbachev had met with Mrs. Prunskiene, after insisting that he would receive Lithuanian leaders only when they bowed to Soviet authority. But the American official who briefed reporters tonight said the United States did not think that a dialogue had begun.

"I would not say that there is a dialogue under way yet," the official said. "Both sides, I think, want to work it out. Both sides, I think, are trying to find a way to do it. But there clearly isn't a meeting of the minds yet."

The outcome of the Lithuanian talks will have an effect on Latvia and Estonia, Lithuania's sister Baltic republics,

which have also declared independence from the Soviet Union but without the clean break from Moscow that Lithuania established. The three republics were independent nations between the two world wars, before they were forcibly annexed by Stalin in 1940 under a secret protocol to a pact with Hitler.

Mrs. Prunskiene, who is generally regarded as a skillful and pragmatic politician, may welcome a bit of prodding from the United States as a way of softening the ardent, anti-compromise faction in the Lithuanian Parliament.

Members of Parliament said suspicion of Moscow remained so intense that further concessions would meet with strong resistance.

Protest Angers Legislators

Kazimieras Moteika, a lawyer and a member of Parliament's leadership, said deputies were angered by a demonstration outside their building today in which anti-independence protesters demanded the resignation of the "separatist government." The protest was assumed to be inspired by Moscow, and was taken by some members of Parliament as a sign of bad faith.

But other Lithuanians suggested that further compromise might be palatable if it was accompanied by Soviet guarantees not to menace the current Lithuanian government, and if Mrs. Prunskiene could make the case that

the West was now watching over Lithuanian interests.

Mrs. Prunskiene said Parliament would consider Moscow's demands, including "whether to suspend, what to suspend, for how long, with what kind of guarantees provided by the Soviet Union."

"And we have to evaluate the guarantees we have now, taking into consideration the position of other countries," she said. "Each time, this position becomes clearer and clearer, because other countries are energetically and actively participating in the discussion and in the search for a solution to the conflict between Lithuania and the Soviet Union. And the Western countries in particular, especially the U.S.A., have now joined in the solution of this issue."

New Soviet Envoy to U.S.

MOSCOW, May 18 (Reuters) — Aleksandr A. Bessmertnykh, a First Deputy Foreign Minister, has been confirmed as Soviet Ambassador to the United States, the official press agency Tass said today. He replaces Yuri V. Dubinin, who will be "transferred to other duties," Tass reported. Mr. Bessmertnykh's appointment was proposed as part of a shuffle of Soviet diplomatic posts in Europe and North America, announced last month.